

FOLLOW THE LIGHT



It's hard not to like a flashlight. It doesn't matter if you are 4 or 84 years old; if someone hands you a flashlight, you turn it on, flash it around, and light up a few things. It's just fun. Follow the Light uses flashlights to enhance visual skills for improved mobility. In Walk the Line (see page 312) and other activities, participants are taught to keep their eyes on the horizon (or at least a few feet farther ahead). Horizon-level visual targets help participants walk more upright and maintain their path and momentum.

Benefits »

- Uses visual targets in a fun way with flashlights.
- Improves posture, gait, and balance.
- Engages other senses (darkness heightens the attention paid to vestibular and somatic senses).
- Links previous learning to a new activity.

Set It Up »

You will need one flashlight per person, ideally; or at least four or five so participants can go in groups (check at your local discount store). You will need a clear, unobstructed area; and the ability to dim the lights. You can also tape down four to six lines (optional). They should be perpendicular to one end of the space and about 8 feet (2.5 meters) long and 4 feet (1.3 meter) apart.

How to Do It »

- Announce you will be dimming the lights for this activity, but not so much that the room will be completely dark. Give participants the chance to opt out if they prefer.
- Pass out flashlights. Participants should test them to see how they work.
- With the room lights still bright, line up small groups of four to six at one end of the room. The rest of the group stays seated and watches.
- Have the group turn on their flashlights.
- Dim lights enough so that the flashlight's beam will be bright.

Stand Normally

- Participants should stand normally and point the flashlight where they normally look at the ground when they walk.
- Ask them to note where they shone the light.
- Those with the least balance will likely be pointing the flashlights just in front of their feet.

Bring Out the Bent Over Posture

- Remind participants of the Bent Over Posture activity (see page 103). They are to pretend they're 98 years old, very frail, and bent over.
- Give them a moment to assume the position. Try these cues:
 - Stand with your knees and back bent and your head tilted down, looking down.
 - Do you notice your weight shift toward your toes? (Remind participants of Parts of the Whole.)
 - Shine your light at the spot on the floor where you suspect a bent over person is seeing the floor.

- ◎ Participants now get to take years off their life.
 - Stand Tall with your head retracted and chin level, looking more directly ahead.
 - Can you feel a difference in how weight is distributed over your feet? (It moves toward the heels.)
 - Shine the light to where you're looking now.
 - Assume a bent over posture again.
 - Do you feel the difference? Do you see the difference?
 - Compare to where you normally see the ground.
 - Which feels more balanced? (Tall posture and level chin, right?)
- ◎ Discover where they are looking now that they have improved their posture.
- ◎ You want participants to feel a difference between looking ahead and looking down. If they feel more balanced while looking ahead, they will be more willing to look ahead while walking.
- ◎ Discuss how not only posture and balance point change with bent over posture, but also visual perception; that is, where they see the ground also changes. If our bent over person was walking, he'd be looking down. The up tall person would be looking out ahead.

Follow the Light

- ◎ Participants shine the flashlight beam back to where it was when they stood normally (normal standing posture).
- ◎ Now they shine the light out about 6 to 8 feet (2-2.5 meters) farther ahead than normal.
- ◎ Participants assume ABLE Bodies tall posture (shoulders over hips, head retracted, chin level, core braced, knees soft). Then they begin to walk toward the beam of light.
- ◎ As they begin to walk, use the following cues.
 - Keep your light 6 to 8 feet (2-2.5 meters) ahead of you.
 - Follow the light.
 - You want to be looking farther ahead than you normally do.
 - Keep your focus ahead. Notice your posture. How do you feel?
 - Walk the full length of the room, turn, and stop at the end.
 - How does the darkness feel?
 - Are you more aware of how the floor feels under your feet?
 - How about the room temperature? Is it warm or cool?
 - How are the noise levels around you—quiet or noisy?
 - Use your flashlight to guide yourself and turn to come back.

Shine the Light Farther Ahead

- ◎ Participants walk back with the flashlight beaming 8 to 10 feet (2.5-3 meters) in front.
- ◎ They can move the light until it's 10 to 12 feet (3-3.5 meters) ahead, if they are willing.

- Maintain core stability—abs in, ribs lifted, and shoulder blades back and down.
- Look ahead and follow the light. Keep the light out 12 feet (3.5 meters) ahead, or at least farther than before.
- How did it go?
- ⦿ Change groups and do the same with them, or go on to Shine the Light on the Wall.

Shine the Light on the Wall

- ⦿ Line participants up about 20 feet (6 meters) away from a wall with a tandem line (optional) in front of them that leads toward the wall.
- ⦿ Invite participants to hold their flashlight next to one ear with the light shining directly on the wall in front of them.
 - The light on the wall is your visual target. Walk toward the light on the wall.
 - Keep knees soft, abs in, ribs lifted, shoulder blades back and down, chin lifted, and head retracted.
 - Let your visual target guide you.
 - Do you feel like you're walking on the tandem line? (Yes, likely.)
 - How is this working for you?
 - Do you feel you can make it to the end without looking down? (Sure)

Give It More Balance »

Try tight tandem walking (heel of one foot nudges toe of previous foot) with flashlights beamed on the wall. This is much more difficult, but it's easier than it seems because it uses a visual target. Let participants choose their own level of challenge here. Remind participants to let the target guide them. It helps!

Keep It Safe »

Whenever you turn down the lights, watch for dizziness, anxiety, or any other signs that the darkness makes participants feel unsafe or uncomfortable. When the lights are first dimmed is an especially good time to have appropriate balance support nearby in case anyone gets dizzy. Once the lights are low, ask if they are still comfortable. Give participants the option of opting out or just watching. Lazer lights can be used instead; they can be seen in well-lit rooms.

Live It »

If participants use visual targets where they are headed, getting there will be much easier. Looking ahead can improve posture, balance, and gait.